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ABSTRACT

Needs assessment is here to stay as schools wishing to apply for grants under the competitive titles of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) must now justify their requests. However, quality assessment data cannot be obtained in the majority of school districts nationally without federal or state budgetary allocations for Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to conduct systematic needs assessments. State combination not selected by the participating schools, option 4: a local adaptation the affective or secondary areas with ESEA Title I money. There is an obvious credibility gap here. On one hand, there is the demand for needs assessment. On the other hand, there is the powerful external influence on local perceptions of needs resulting from requirements for programs under categorical federal and state funding. Because of legislation, special funding, and other external pressures, schools may find it difficult to take a new look at their goals and their programs. Since it is obvious that federal and state agencies will continue to demand needs assessments, these agencies must also be realistic enough to provide the necessary assistance to insure that locally determined priority needs will be met. Changes in the ESEA Title I statute, guidelines, and funding must be made in order to achieve these ends. (Author/MV)

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EMERGENCE OF NEEDS ASSESSMENT AS A BASIS FOR TITLE I PLANNING

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Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Convention, San Francisco, April 1976

This paper is one of five presented at the American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, San Francisco, April, 1976 as part of a symposium entitled "Evaluating Title I in an Urban School System -- A Decade of Happenings".

Because the word "need" and the concept "needs assessment" seem to have unique meaning to different individuals, it is important to begin with definitions of the terms which will leave little doubt in the mind of the reader about what is meant. For the purposes of this presentation, a need is defined as the difference between the desired learner status (what should be) and the current learner status (what is). An educational needs assessment is defined as a process by which educational needs of students are identified and ranked in order of importance. Note that in both definitions we choose to emphasize student rather than institutional needs.

According to this definition, needs are not such things as individualization of instruction, open classrooms, programmed instruction, differentiated staffing, etc. These are examples of solutions or means for reaching a solution, and as such should be selected and used after the needs and the causes had been identified. All of the above have in common the fact that they are means, strategies, techniques, or tools for achieving unspecified outcomes.

One of the greatest early shortcomings of Title I in planning for compensatory education programs was the failure to ward off attempts to spell out solutions before the problems had been identified and analyzed. See March's "Garbage Can Model of Decision-Making" which describes quantitatively this phenomenon of solutions seeking to attach themselves to problems rather than problems in search of solutions.

A historical examination of this initial miscalculation reveals that although the concept of "need" defined as a gap was first used by Ralph Tyler in his historic work on curriculum development in the early fifties, the fervor surrounding the implementation of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 preempted consideration of anything other than the sheer mechanics of making the formula work and distributing funds. The following statements were made by President Johnson in April of 1965:

> "First, I do not wish to delay by a single day the program to strengthen this nation's elementary and secondary schools. I devoutly hope that my sense of urgency will be communicated to Secretary Celebreze, Commissioner Keppel, and other educational officers throughout the country who will be responsible for carrying out this program".

and on September 23, 1965:

> "Today, we reach out to 5½ million children held behind their more fortunate schoolmates by the dragging anchor of poverty. Act now. Get your plans made. Open your schools to the promise of these new programs. I hope that not a single day will be lost for in education the time we waste today can mean a life wasted tomorrow".

These statements illustrate the pressure for precluding any planning grant requirements. The assumption was that the establishment would know how to act effectively and appropriately.

It should also be noted that while Title I was given top priority by the United States Office of Education (USOE) in public information emphasizing its $1 billion budget, this was an operational rather than a substantive priority.

Title I was relegated to second class status while priority was given to Title III in terms of staff resources and to Title V

with respect to scheduling. This resulted from Title III, that portion of the ESEA of 1965 establishing innovative programs, being touted as the means which would yield the greatest return for the federal investment. And, concurrently, Title V, that portion of the Act designed to strengthen state agencies, being given scheduling priority because of pressure from chief state school officers. USOE cleared its program instructions to obtain plans from the states which could be processed quickly.

Title I's glamour rating was lowered by absence of provision for federal approval of local projects. As a result USOE unloaded the responsibility to state education agencies (SEAs) and to local education agencies (LEAs).

Program administration is governed by national program regulations, which are supplemented at the state level by additional state regulations and priorities. With few exceptions, the program regulations did not specify the types of services to be provided; LEAs were directly challenged by Title I to develop programs best suited to the needs of their own children.

With little direction from their SEAs who in turn received little from USOE, LEAs were not prepared to do this. However, enterprising profit organizations such as Behavioral Research Laboratories (BRL) were. BRL prepared a summary "to save you time in interpreting this new law, particularly insofar as it relates to programmed instruction. The information presented below was reviewed for accuracy by 'appropriate' officials of USOE."

Q. "What are my guidelines in applying for Title I funds?"

A. "Very broad and permissive. Anything judged necessary for improving the education of the educationally disadvantaged child."

Q. "Any special requirements?"

A. "No. Only that present efforts must be continued and, if possible, increased."

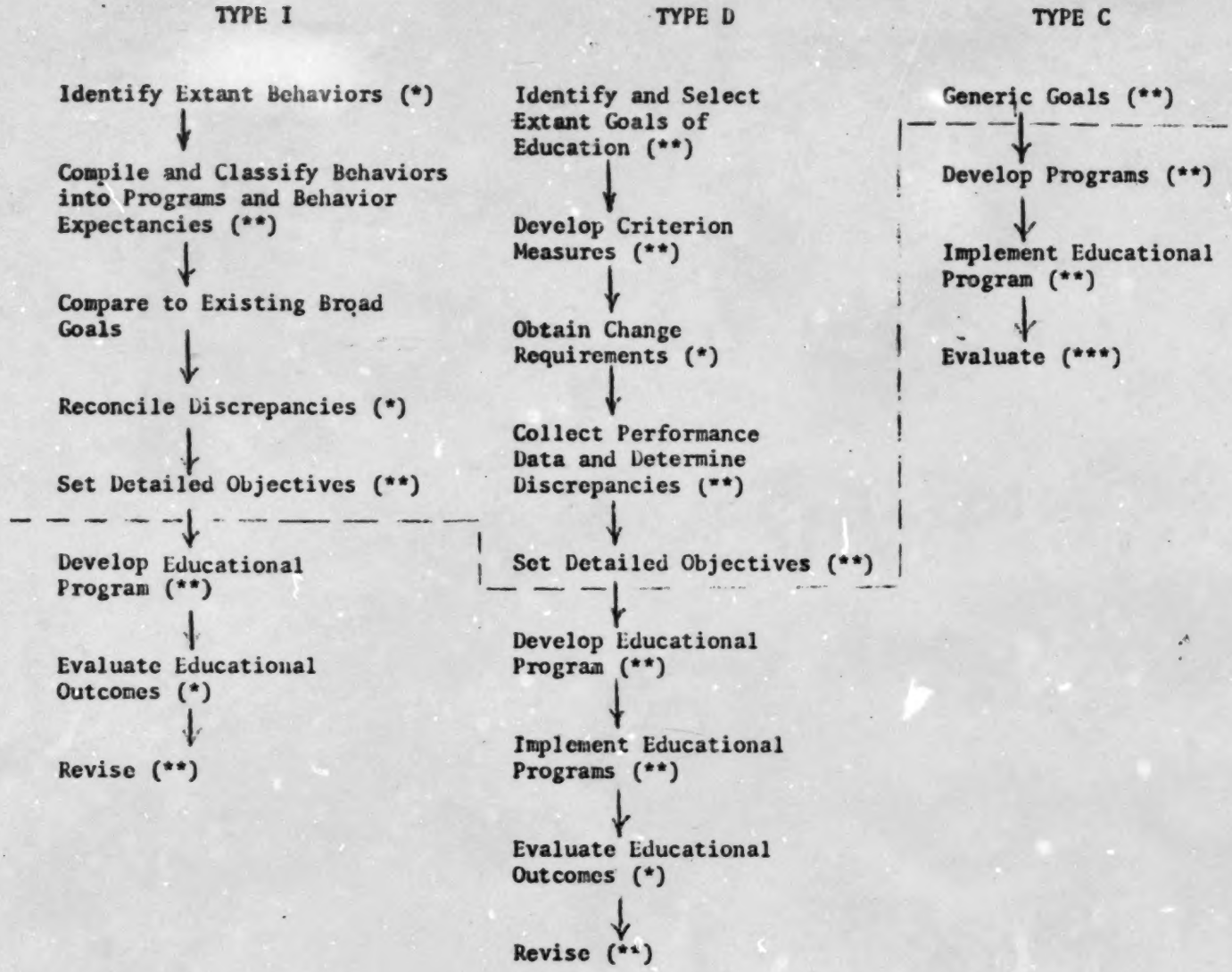
LEAs viewed poor performance as resulting from child failure rather than school failure. This produced a corresponding lack in systematic techniques by which to deal with the needs of these children in relation to school learning and led to the extensive use of Kaufman's classical (type C) procedural model of needs assessment rather than an inductive (type I) or deductive (type D) shown in Figure 1, pg. 5. The modules differ primarily in terms of their starting point for the determination of the goals and objectives for education.

The classical model which starts with generic goals set by educators was used, usually by default, almost exclusively nationally in setting up Title I programs. (For an exception, see discussion of Pennsylvania's pioneering efforts, pg. 10). It is the author's opinion that SEAs should withold funding of programs in which needs were assessed in the classical manner. It should be recognized, however the SEAs have the responsibility given them through the Education Amendments of 1974 to provide "models for evaluations of all programs". Without budgetary allocations for LEAs to conduct systematic local needs assessments, however, these models may be an academic exercise.

Illustrative of the national trend in 1965, the Cleveland City Schools proceeded to establish services for deprived children,

FIGURE 1

GENERIC STRATEGIES FOR ASSESSING EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND IDENTIFYING GOALS


TYPE I
Identify Extant Behaviors (*)
Compile and Classify Behaviors into Programs and Behavior Expectancies (**)
Compare to Existing Broad Goals
Reconcile Discrepancies (*)
Set Detailed Objectives (**)
Develop Educational Program (**)
Evaluate Educational Outcomes (*)
Revise (**)
TYPE D
Identify and Select Extant Goals of Education (**)
Develop Criterion Measures (**)
Obtain Change Requirements (*)
Collect Performance Data and Determine Discrepancies (**)
Set Detailed Objectives (**)
Develop Educational Program (**)
Implement Educational Programs (**)
Evaluate Educational Outcomes (*)
Revise (**)
TYPE C
Generic Goals (**)
Develop Programs (**)
Implement Educational Program (**)
Evaluate (***)

(*) Accomplished by educators and representives of sub-community members served by the agency
(**) Accomplished primarily by educators
(***) Primarily accomplished unsystematically

At least three types of needs assessment models have been identified:

1. Deductive models (type D).
2. Inductive models (type I).
3. Classical models.(type C).

Taken from Kaufman, R. A.: Educational System Planning. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1972.

devising twelve projects which their "conventional educational wisdom" told them were needed. According to Hughes, "Many of the services were hastily devised 'extras', such as summer school, camping, field trips, and tutoring, which were easily set in place while the system was groping for handles on their problem of treating human deprivation." (It wasn't until 1969-70 that Cleveland began to attack this problem through the application of three major principles. One was academic deficit prevention. The second was continuity of service to the same young children. The third principle was having a common purpose or mission for all of its projects serving disadvantaged children.)

By 1967, the initial effort of Title I nationally to improve educational outcomes by means of compensatory education programs had resulted in little actual improvement and much disillusionment. John Hughes, Director of the Division of Compensatory Education, in a letter to all chief state school officers dated 4/14/67, commented that the experience of USOE during the first two years of Title I indicated a definite need for specific "basic criteria" particularly with respect to "size, scope, and quality" of projects.

Similarly, B. Alden Lilywhite, Deputy Associate Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education, USOE, in a letter of 7/30/69 indicated that a given state's ESEA Title III State Plan was to include procedures for conducting a statewide needs assessment in order to identify critical learner needs.

However, while these federal documents as did subsequent ones required SEAs and LEAs to undertake a needs assessment, the term is never clearly defined. As McLaughlin points out, in some publications only economic need is considered. Other documents refer to educational

deficits. And the level of focus is never specified. The regulations do not make it clear whether needs assessment is to focus on the participating child, the designation of eligible "project areas", or what part the resulting analysis is to play in the design of Title I projects.

The fuzzy and confusing language of the regulations has meant that school administrators often faced their first challenge in implementing ESEA Title I not in thinking about and planning effective strategies, but in simply trying to understand the rules of the game.

A school administrator cannot be sure, in studying the Title I documents, which guidelines are mandates and which are merely suggestions. Many directives in USOE publications contain the verb "should" rather than the legally appropriate "shall" or "must." The case can be made that a phrase such as "this section should include procedures and criteria for determining criticality of needs, extent to which the needs are actually based on the assessment data, and the extent to which the needs of various areas of the State are reflected in the needs," (Lilywhite's letter of 7/30/69) is more a suggestion than a mandatory regulation.

A multitude of other examples could be marshalled to illustrate the confusing and imprecise terminology which describes the parameters of compliant behavior. These inconsistencies and ambiguities do little to clarify the requirements from the federal project manager's or school superintendent's point of view.

Tangentially, Dr. Paul W. Briggs, Superintendent of the Cleveland Schools, and representing the large city school districts delivered an invitational statement before Commissioner Bell and the Division Chiefs of the USOE in February 1975. In this statement Dr. Briggs described the apparent discrepancy between the legislative intent and the actual implementation of the Titled programs established under the ESEA of 1965.

In referring to the U.S. Office of Education regulations which established sixteen criteria to be applied in considering proposals from school systems, Dr. Briggs was especially critical of the first criterion which focused on the extent to which proposed projects met "...the most critical educational needs in the area of the state to be served by the project."

Dr. Briggs' criticism centered on two assumptions implied by this criterion. The first of these is the assumption that educational needs within various areas of a state have been accurately assessed and given priority ratings. The second assumption is that the most critical needs for a given school system will correspond with the most critical needs defined for that system's area of the state.

He charged that these assumptions, unfortunately, are not always justified, and that adherence to the criterion places constraints on local initiative instead of providing "...local education agencies with the greatest flexibility possible."

One needs only to examine Ohio's early efforts in its 1972 "Search For Consensus" in joining the current movement toward educational planning via establishment of goals and objectives at the state level to confirm Briggs' concerns.

Nearly 100,000 individuals who participated in Local Citizens Seminars held in 604 of Ohio's 623 school districts to draft a statement of goals for education in the Bicentennial Era submitted a total of 12,500 written recommended goals. The following ten goals were most often mentioned:

1. Communication between the school and community must be improved.
2. More individualized instruction is desired.
3. Additional vocational education classes are needed.
4. Qualified teachers should be employed who will work with enthusiasm and dedication to provide each student with a positive educational experience.
5. More paraprofessionals should be employed to allow teachers additional time for working individually with students.
6. The public should be kept informed about their schools through additional printed materials such as a school newsletter or the local newspaper.
7. Teacher performance should be evaluated on a regular basis.
8. The curriculum should contribute to the social, physical and academic growth of the individual.
9. Special education should be expanded to provide additional services for the gifted and the physically and mentally handicapped.

10. Basic education--the three R's should be emphasized to provide every student with the fundamental skills necessary to function in this technological age.

The State Department of Education described this effort as meeting with success beyond their highest expectations. In examining the ten statements listed above one realizes that what was identified were generally solutions rather than goals. Furthermore, the study generated a "waterfront" of directives for planning rather than any valid consensus. "Search for Consensus" quietly passed from the scene.

Interestingly Ohio's neighbor Pennsylvania was the first state to move forward formally. The 1963 General Assembly of Pennsylvania passed Act 299, containing a mandate for commonwealth educational performance standards. Educational Testing Services (ETS) was commissioned to develop a plan for implementing the legislation.

ETS returned its recommendation, "Ten Goals of Quality Education for Pennsylvania". No attempt was made to involve people extensively in drafting these goals (an advisory committee of thirty public and teaching representatives was used) which were adopted by the State Board of Education in 1965. However, development of the plan was delayed until 1968 when a Title III ESEA grant was obtained. Measuring tools, field testing, and sampling procedures were developed which yielded, in June 1971, a series of twenty-three booklets describing the manner of assessing the performance objectives that add meaning to Pennsylvania's "Ten Goals of Quality Education". This ambitious undertaking did not yield clear data until 1973 - a full decade after the passage of the authorizing legislation, however,

For all of the reasons described above, then, the Type C model of needs assessment procedures is still being employed in the majority of school districts nationally. There had been no real incentive for school officials to change.

The Educational Amendments of 1974 appear to have had the greatest potential in Ohio, at least, to move school districts into Type I or Type D models. As a direct result of this legislation the Ohio Department of Education has developed a model employing either Type I or D (LEAs may choose) and has funded several Title V-C projects (including one in Cleveland) to conduct local needs assessments.

This Title V-C grant has enabled Cleveland to expand needs assessment to its non-Title I schools. Cleveland's experience has been to validate the Ohio Model for large urban school districts. Our ability to successfully follow the model can be attributed in large measure to our earlier experience (Cleveland has conducted systematic needs assessments since the 1973-74 school year) in Title I schools where assessments were undertaken despite severe monetary restrictions and lack of specified state guidelines, goals, and direction.

It is important to note that only about 20 out of approximately 600 school districts in Ohio received one-year grants to conduct needs assessments. There seems to be little doubt, however, that needs assessment is here to stay as schools wishing to apply for grants under the competitive titles of ESEA must justify their requests.

The intent of this requirement is a valid one, the assumption being that having conducted a needs assessment, one finds himself in a position to make some decisions--decisions that ought to be more in-

formed than those one would have made before one began his assessment. The key decision is to determine whether the identified needs warrent taking one of four courses of future action: (1) to leave the program(s) alone; (2) to modify or otherwise change the existing program(s); (3) to eliminate it (them); or (4) to eliminate it (them) and replace it (them) with some other alternative program(s).

However, federal and state officials responsible for monitoring this requirement should be aware that Witkin's study for NIE of needs assessment techniques found an inverse ratio between the sophistication and completeness of a model and its widespread and enthusiastic acceptance and implementation. Quality assessment data cannot be obtained in the majority of school districts nationally without federal or state budgetary allocations for LEAs to conduct systematic needs assessments.

Moreover, one must also question the role of federal and state legislation and intervention in establishing program direction for LEAs. What has been the effect of the priorities thus established? e.g., Some federal and state mandates have stressed reading and cognitive skills as the major need for program development and funding. It appears that other, perhaps more pressing needs for the long term, have been overlooked. e.g., Results of needs assessments conducted in Cleveland during the past three years indicate a trend toward identification of greatest actual need in the affective domain. Greatest actual (as distinguished from perceived) needs have been found to be located at the secondary rather than at the primary level.

State guidelines presently preclude funding of these locally determined priority needs in the affective or secondary areas with

Title I money. There is an obvious credibility gap here. On one hand, the demand for needs assessment. On the other hand, the powerful external influence on local perceptions of needs resulting from requirements for programs under categorical federal and state funding. Because of legislation, special funding, and other external pressures, schools may find it difficult to take a new look at their goals and their programs.

Since it is obvious that federal and state agencies will continue to demand needs assessments, these agencies must also be realistic enough to provide the necessary assistance to insure that locally determined priority needs will be met. It is imperative then that changes[1] in the ESEA Title I statute, guidelines and funding must be made in order to achieve these ends.

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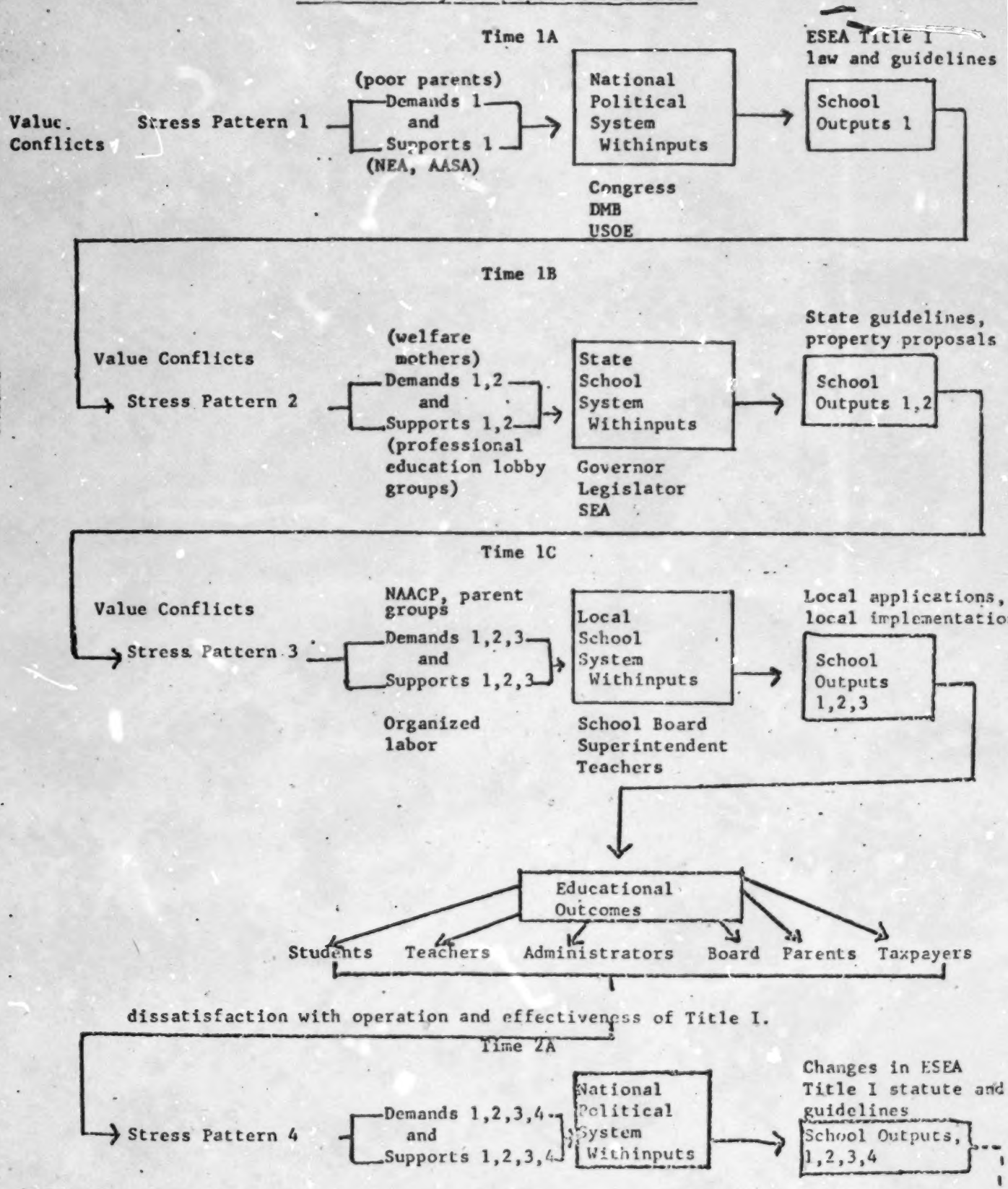
[1]These changes will demand an understanding of the framework within which federal policy is enmeshed. See Wirt and Kirst's description of "Federal Policy in a Systems Framework", (Figure 2, page 14) for a comprehensive model outlining the multiplicity of factors and variables which influence the development of federal policy.

FIGURE 2

Federal Policy in A Systems Framework*



*Adapted from Frederick Wirt and Michael Kirst: The Political Web of American Schools Boston, Little Brown 1972

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